

Movie Makers

January-February 2004

Volume 14 No. 1

The American Motion Picture Society

From The President

First, my thanks for the honor of being asked to be the Chairman of the American Motion Picture Society, be assured I will do my best to serve the Society and its members.

Some information on my background, I have been an enthusiastic filmmaker since the 1960s and joined the amateur movement in Britain through the IAC, of which I have been a member for many years. I had the good fortune to be introduced to film making by attending early courses sponsored by the IAC and tutored by some of the best amateur filmmakers in the UK. I joined a "cine club" and worked with friends, we had fun making movies in Regular 8, Super 8 and when the funds allowed, 16 mm and a hobby eventually became a profession.

I am now semi-retired and living in Southwest Utah amidst the most stunning and accessible scenery in the world. I work with the miniDV format, shooting with a Canon XL1s and editing with Final Cut Pro on a Mac G4 and Cinestream 3 on a PC.

With the advent of affordable digital video systems and computer non linear editing software the scene was set for an explosion of amateur and independent film making and so it has been. The amateur filmmaker is now using the same tools as the professional and image and sound quality have the potential to equal those we see and hear on TV and in the cinema. But it is the creative element of film making that matters most and here the amateur can let the imagination run free. As sponsors of the *American Film and Video Festival*, AMPS is well positioned to benefit in this expand-

ing world of amateur filmmaking.

We must have a dialog within the membership of AMPS to ensure that we share the same goals and vision for the future so please e-mail me with your comments, ideas and suggestions - I need all the help I can get and be assured of my careful consideration and discussion of future developments. I will outline my ideas for the future in the next issue of Movie Makers and look forward to your response, but please do not wait until then to send in your ideas and expectations as I need your input now.

Thank you

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inside...

Lighting Concerns
Diary of a Film Part 2
It's Not Too Early!
Roger and Me
Why Documentaries?
Ampex

page 3
page 4
Page 4
page 5
Page 6
page 7

Movie Makers

Dedicated to the interests of the Serious Motion Picture Maker.

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George W. Cushman
Founder,
1909-1996

Matt Jenkins, Editor

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From the Editor

Congratulations to Ned Cordery for assuming the helm of AMPS. I know him from his work and writing that appears in these pages and in this issue. I think he is ideal for the job.

Hats off to Melinda Stone for being festival chair and running the competition. She did a fantastic job!

Congratulations to the winners. I have received a copy of the winner's reel and look forward to viewing it.

The Internet lines were burning up with concerns and complaints regarding announcements for the convention and various other festivals. As I understand it, the number of entries in our festivals dropped to forty this year. As our membership decreases, the number of entries will also get smaller. A couple of years ago I remember an AMPS member, who previously had been festival chair, was asked to reprise the role. He indicated a firm no, that he didn't make "those" kinds of movies anymore. He had moved on to "professional" kinds of productions. Now wait, before you turn the page, read the rest of this.

First, we need to ask our-

selves if the number of entries in other festival are down as well. If not, what's happening to our competition?

Second, have we become an exclusive club by hiding behind the amateur vs. professional argument? Meaning, we only award ourselves for our own work and not allow others outside of our society who might be considered independent or professional to win because it might be unfair?

What is going to help us survive is making our festival different and better than the other competitions out there. And to include entries that perhaps wouldn't have been accepted in the past.

Finally, we need more involvement from our membership. Roger Garretson can only do so much before he gets burned out. I love to talk about the historical aspects of our festival and take great pride in it. However, I have to wonder if it is worth continuing if the number of entries and members continue to drop.

As always, you may e-mail to me at mattj@cameron.edu

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Lighting Concerns

Lighting is so important that I have two light kits. I keep one here in Oklahoma and one in Connecticut as I find myself often shooting on the East Coast. My mantra for lighting is:

Great lighting will always improve a mediocre production and poor lighting will always ruin a great production.

Keep in mind the following objectives when lighting:

Provide sufficient illumination for camera operation.

Simply, no light no picture. The camera does not record the subject. Rather it captures the light reflected off of the subject. Why beginning movie makers insist on shooting wide shots at night is really beyond me as they can never adequately light large areas for proper camera operation and still have it look naturally like night. For your first big epic production, shoot during the day!

Create mood and time of day.

Consider the lighting of a horror movie, its dark with lots of shadows. Now think about your favorite comedy, brightly and evenly lit with little shadow. Creating mood is

essential in good story telling. Does your lighting convey the genre of picture your producing? Also, different times of day consist of different kinds of light. If your character is going outside at six AM, there is different kind of light outside than at 12 noon. Be sure to light for the appropriate time of day.

Direct attention to the important elements in the scene.

Turn on any network news program. The anchor is the brightest lit object in the shot. Our eyes tend to focus on the brightest object in the shot. Never shoot a person standing in front of a window as your subject will be too dark in relation to the background. Also avoid having lamps and ceiling fixtures in the shot unless they are turned off. They will end up being the brightest objects in the shot competing with your subject for your audience's attention.

Create the artificial sense of depth.

Television and the movie screen are two-dimensional. As creators, one of our tasks should be to create an artificial sense of depth. This can be done through camera angle, subject positioning, use of background and through lighting. Use your lighting to create subtle shadows that aid the viewer in determining depth in the shot.

Things to include in a light kit.

I put together a quality light kit for as little as thirty dollars. I found three mini fresnel lighting instruments at a yard sale for 10 dollars. I had to rewire them and purchase new bulbs but the fresnel lens work well and I use the lights in all my productions. If you are fortunate to find professional lights that need attention and do not feel trained to do the repair yourself, take the lights to a lamp repair store or an electrician for refurbishing. I have also used the work lights that you can purchase at any hardware store for about 40 dollars. They often come two to a box with a tripod stand. While these lights aren't as professional as a pro kit, they can be made to work.

You can use them by bouncing the light off of another object such as a wall or ceiling to get the light. I wouldn't point these bright lights at an object, it will cause over saturation in your camera. One option is to purchase diffusion material to cover the lights and cut down on brightness. **BIG CAUTION HERE.** Do not and I mean **DO NOT** use just any kind of material to diffuse your light. Using cloth or paper towels or other kinds of material will be a fire hazard once the lights get hot. Don't compromise. Find a professional lighting source on the Internet or in larger cities and

(Continued on page 7)

Diary of a film Part 2

Ned Cordery

The first part of this story ended as we set out to cast our planned film, "Red Rock Blues" a story of retirees in Southern Utah. At the end of that article I commented that this would be the hard part, how right I was!

As we are looking for actors of mature years the local college was not an option although it has a strong theater and film department, so we contacted a local theater group and their producer/director gave us a list of actors in our age range with whom he had worked. A mail out to them with a brief outline of our production got a small response, but this looked promising so we followed up with a few pages of the script, enough to give a flavor of what we were aiming for. This produced another response that was quite interesting, several of the actors wrote in making suggestions about the script, one with a very promising resume wrote that the story seemed very dark and the premise of retirees in a new culture offered a lot of opportunities for com-

edy! New ideas are always welcome but a complete rewrite shifting from a dark drama to comedy was outside my plan let alone my abilities, comedy is extremely difficult to do well.

So after a number of exchanges we regrouped and spent a lot of time thinking and not doing very much.

Now a small diversion, the original premise for the film was based on friends, Hal and Eva I will call them, who had retired from the North and led lives of great energy and involvement in many activities and this had triggered a response from me that wanted to look at the reverse of their life style. The great "what if" that is the starting point for all story films. I had never mentioned the film to them until one evening at dinner I gave them an outline and with considerable trepidation asked if they would be interested in taking the lead roles. They both agreed with great enthusiasm and it transpired that Hal had considerable acting experience, although a business major in college he had acted in a number of college productions and later been an on-camera interviewer for a corporate film and Eva had acted in smaller roles. These were hidden talents about which we knew nothing and so suddenly we had our leads and they didn't want to rewrite the script!

We are gearing up for a mid-March shoot and Alberto has bought a new camera, the Panasonic AG-DVX 80.

Beautiful images with a clean, transparent quality and a very good wide angle without the use of a supplementary lens, nice for shooting in normal sized rooms. Part 3 will report on our experiences during the shoot.

It's Not Too Early!

That's right! It's not too early to begin thinking about this year's combined AMMA/AMPS/TBW Festival.

It will be held in Victoria, B.C. from September 23rd until September 26th. The annual gathering of filmmakers will be held at the newly refurbished Harbour Towers Hotel. Many members may remember that this is the same hotel where the festival was held in 1996. Many attendees look back on that festival with fond memories.

Victoria is such a charming place and September is a wonderful time to visit.

***Mark your
Calendars
now!***

Roger and Me

Matt Jenkins

No, this isn't an article about Michael Moore and his documentary. I just returned from Orange, California. There I interviewed Randy Ema of Randy Ema Inc. for my latest documentary.

Roger Garretson, AMPS Secretary/Treasurer and a good friend, offered to provide equipment and assistance for the shoot. The shoot went extremely well and the footage looks excellent, thanks to Roger's efforts.

Traveling to California from Oklahoma to videotape an interview takes a lot of planning and faith that the production will proceed smoothly.

I was in the editing stage of my latest documentary titled "Pray's Passion." This documentary details the remarkable story of Glenn Pray, a Tulsa school teacher who in 1960, purchased the Auburn-Cord-Duesenberg Automobile Company and moved it to Broken Arrow, Oklahoma. He began manufacturing second a generation Cord and later an Auburn Speedster.

I have been talking to Glenn on a fairly regular basis regarding the documentary's

progress and he indicated that it would be a great idea to interview Randy Ema, an Orange, California automobile restoration expert and historian. Randy is known as "Jay Leno's mechanic."

Randy would bring a different dimension to the production. Up to this point I had interviewed Glenn, his children and close associates. Randy would be someone who could be considered an expert separate from Glenn.

It did take a phone call from Glenn to Randy to clear the way for the interview.

After Randy agreed to the interview I needed to secure funding for the trip.

With Randy's guidance, I found a hotel nearby and arranged to fly into John Wayne International Airport. I also arranged for a rental car.

Then I turned my attention to preparing for the shoot. What questions would I ask? First I looked at my rough cut and found weak areas that he might strengthen with his responses. I also went back through my research. The nice thing about this documentary is Glenn had kept articles in scrapbooks from all the years he was manufacturing cars. So gathering the research was easy. Going through it all was time consuming.

However, as a documentary

maker, it is important to have a familiarity with the topic. So appropriate questions can be created and time will not be wasted.

I decided to have Randy answer questions dealing with the importance of the cars, who Glenn Pray is, and historical aspects of the story.

Doing your homework is important. I know I hate being asked the question, "Tell me everything you know about this." That kind of question indicates the interviewer is not prepared and probably doesn't care about the topic.

I planned to bring a camera, plenty of videotape and a microphone. Roger agreed to supply lights, light reflective umbrellas and a tripod.

Arriving in Orange on Thursday, I picked up the rental car, checked into the hotel and went to meet Randy at his shop. He was extremely cordial. We spent some time getting acquainted. Then we discussed the main points of the documentary but I did not give him the questions as I did not want to receive "canned" responses.

Then Randy allowed me to look at vintage car ads and photos. I was able to copy many of these ads and pictures onto videotape. That night I logged the footage I shot and reviewed my questions for Friday.

(Continued on page 6)

Why Documentaries?

By Matt Jenkins

A good movie can excite us, entrap us, and involve us. This eye candy and its video offspring is used to entertain us, persuade us, and control us. And in this instant information world, tightly woven by TV, Internet, and cell phone, there still exists a genre of movie-making that is as old as the motion picture itself. That genre is the documentary.

There are many definitions for the word documentary. Some of those include, the telling of truth, the creative telling of reality, non-fiction, boring television, and something to fill the time slot. All of these definitions fall short of the meaning of a documentary.

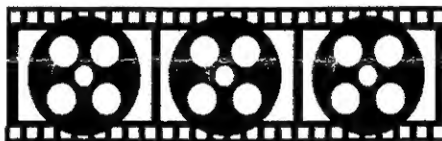
Why would someone produce a documentary? The markets and distribution outlets for them are few. There isn't much money to be made in documentary production. Yet documentaries still are produced.

Perhaps the reasons for making documentaries and its true definition lie somewhere in the thoughts of John Grierson, a British documentary

maker. Grierson talked about how documentaries were more than "mere mirrors held up to society." Documentaries are the hammers that help shape our lives.

Combine Grierson's idea and the love of telling a good story with an interest in history or, social issues or, a curiosity for exploration and perhaps then you are on the path to finding out the meaning of a documentary.

While movies and television can excite us, entrap us, involve us, entertain us, inform us, and control us, a good documentary can persuade us and change us.



(Continued from page 5)

Friday, Randy and I met with Roger at 9 AM and we began to set up the lights. We chose a spot next to an Auburn automobile that Randy was restoring. Roger brought three Sun Gun lights with reflective umbrellas and floor stands. I don't like to shine bare light onto my subjects so the reflective umbrellas diffused the light nicely.

One light created a harsh shadow on the firewall of the Auburn. So we swapped out the light with a softer one and he shadow disappeared. I was thankful for Roger being there and catching my mis-

takes!

The interview went well. I always try to ask open-ended questions and not try to lead the interviewee. So crafting the questions is very important. I may ask the same questions two or three different ways in order to get the best response.

We stopped for lunch and ate at a restaurant that was used as a scene in the Tom Hanks' picture, "That Thing You Do." We conducted a second round of interviewing and then shot more stills.

Roger and I then packed up his equipment around 4 PM and said our goodbyes.

Friday night was spent logging the day's efforts. Saturday, Randy took me to a car museum where his Cord was on display. I also conducted a third interview with him to cover questions I left out of the previous interview.

I spent Saturday evening logging the remainder of the footage and deciding where to put it in the documentary. Sunday I returned to Oklahoma.

Now I am in the process of adding the new footage to the documentary. The finished product will be worth the extra effort Roger and I put into it.

Ampex

No 26 – September 1995

George Cushman

THIS IS A TRUE STORY.

It happened many years ago when the term "high fidelity" was first used to describe sound recordings that had excellent quality.

It was at a time when Ampex sound recorders were considered the best money could buy. Radio and TV stations were installing Ampex equipment. Many experts believed Ampex was the finest sound system available at that time.

A fellow, we'll call him Andrew, though that wasn't his real name, entered a film in a competition. It was a documentary on the Hawaiian Islands and appeared to be a film he shot while vacationing there,

The film depicted many of the usual sights a visitor to the islands encounters including hula dancers, the volcanoes, white beaches, pineapple fields, resort hotels, and so on.

After editing his footage he realized he would have to add a sound track. He decided to use only music. Apparently what he had done was to buy an album of Hawaiian music and started playing it on one side and going straight through to the end without a break of any kind.

While his footage was excellent, sharp, well exposed, with a pacing that indicated he was no

novice to film editing, his mismatch of the music left a lot to be desired.

In fact it was this error in the music track that caused the judges to give his entry a low score.

In those days entrants were allowed to attend the judging sessions and when Andrew learned his Hawaiian epic did not score very well he went to one of the judges and asked why not.

The judge was sincere and told him he could not give his film a very high mark because of his music.

"My music," Andrew screamed, "but it was recorded on an Ampex!"

Yes the quality of the music was, indeed, high fidelity, but the music didn't match the action. There didn't seem to be any attempt to score the tempo of the melodies with the subject matter. Andrew had done well with his footage, but it was clear he knew nothing about selecting the right music to keep step with what was being seen.

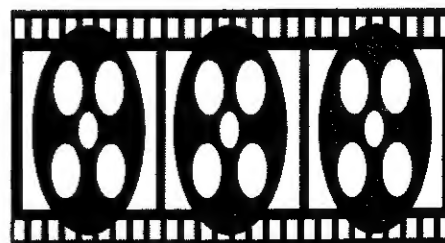
Quality of recording is to be expected, but it is not nearly as important to a picture as that it correctly supplement the action on the screen. Moviemakers who want to win competitions must give as much consideration to their sound track as they do the visual part of their production, yet it must be remembered that the visual portion of a picture is always the dominant factor. Sound, no matter how good, is always a secondary consideration.

(Continued from page 3)

spend the money to purchase the proper diffusion material. This material is designed to not be a fire hazard and is for use with hot lights. Only attach the diffusion material to the front of your lights using WOODEN CLOTHES PINS. Plastic ones will melt, burn and smell bad. In the end, be safe, and pay attention to your lights, they can be hazardous if improperly handled.

No lights? Use the sun and a reflector. Go to any big department store and purchase a silver car sunshade for about 4 dollars. These things work as well as the 85 dollar reflectors purchased from a photography store. Of course you will need to recruit someone to hold the reflector when shooting. But reflectors work great and shoot with close-ups if necessary.

Purchase thick, quality extension cords and don't overload them with too many lights! Don't overload your outlets with too many lights and always know with the fuse or breaker box is if you blow a fuse. And, never handle hot lights, they will burn you!



**Winner's Reel and
Copyright Issues
discussion video
now available**

The winners reel from this year's festival is available for \$7.00 The reel is only available in VHS.

Also available for purchase is Mark Levy's discussion "Copyright Issues and Video-making." Mark gave this presentation at the convention. It is an interesting program and a must for anyone serious about production. The Copyright video is available for \$5.00. Please make the check or money order payable to AMPS and send to Roger Garretson. The reel is only available in VHS.

**APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP
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I Would like to Join the Society:

Dues USA: (includes - Movie Maker) \$ 10.00

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